

# magazine

Keeping you informed about the European Credit system for Vocational Education & Training

## Annual ECVET Forum 2012

Taking the next step:  
Building an ECVET community of practice

Brussels - 31 May - 1 June 2012



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The 2012 ECVET forum was organised by the European Commission and Cedefop with the support of the ECVET team.



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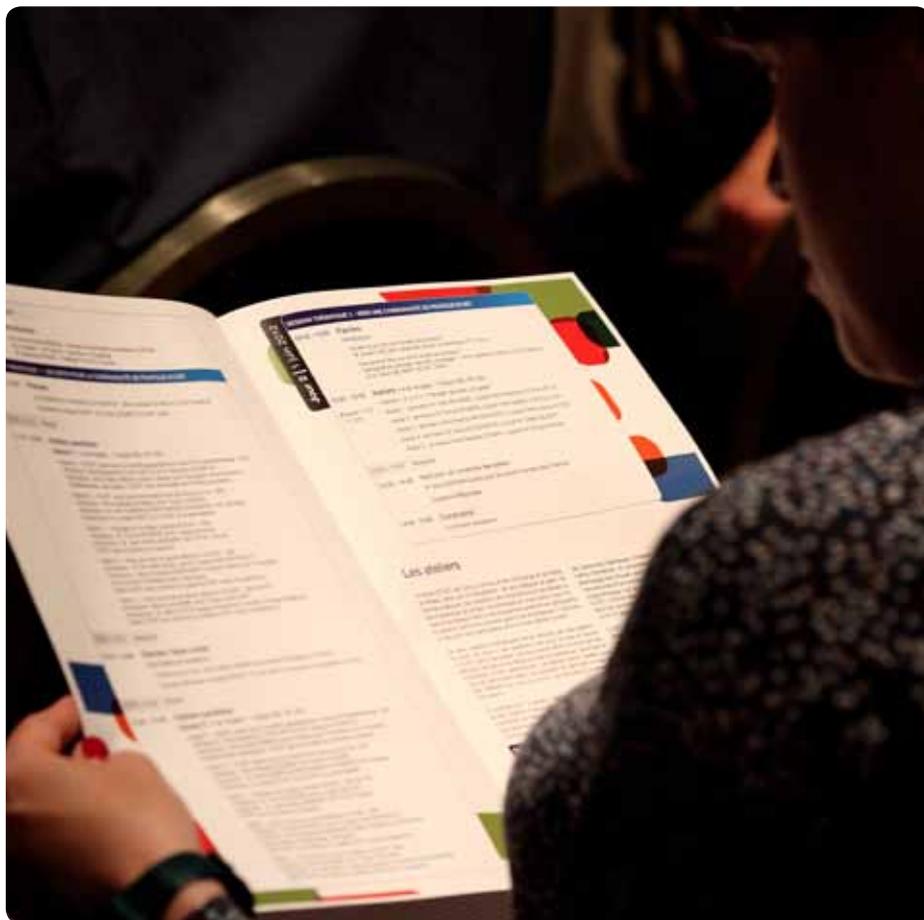


# Context

In the Bruges Communiqué (2011) European Member States expressed their commitment to developing high quality vocational education and training (VET) in Europe. This is part of Europe's 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and Member States have underlined the importance of enabling individuals to acquire the skills they need at the start and during their professional lives. The Communiqué also sought to increase substantially the number of learners and teaching staff taking part in a transnational mobility scheme for VET. Building on the achievements of the Copenhagen Process, Member States called for further progress in developing national qualifications frameworks, credit systems, validation mechanisms and the shift to learning outcomes.

Meanwhile the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) and the process of making a link to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are major initiatives which support VET reform. The learning outcomes approach binds together the different elements of the education and training systems to create greater transparency in relation to qualifications and an improved link to the labour market.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) supports lifelong learning, learners' mobility and the development of more flexible ways to achieve qualifications. Interest in ECVET is growing. This is clear from the resources that European countries have invested in developing and implementing ECVET. They have



established strategies and approaches that are consistent with their national or regional education and training systems. ECVET activities have included the establishment of working groups, feasibility studies and testing the ECVET concept. Over the past two years these activities have intensified and the focus has been on informing and communicating the ECVET message. In addition there has been a greater focus on setting up the infrastructure, establishing policies to support ECVET, preparing legislation and training experts in ECVET-related matters.

The ECVET Recommendation foresaw:

- a preparatory period up to 2012 during which Member States were asked to

create the necessary conditions and to adopt measures with a view to introducing ECVET. During this period, each Member State was invited to test out the idea of ECVET (supported by the lifelong education and training programme) in advance of the 2012 target;

- a period up to 2014 to gradually introduce ECVET. There was also a possibility of revising the European Recommendation in 2014.

This annual forum took place at a crucial time for the European ECVET project. The forum provided opportunities for a wide range of interested parties to discuss progress, exchange ideas and build on existing networks.



## Welcome and introduction

ECVET's third annual forum was dedicated to further developing ECVET in Europe. The two-day forum was attended by over 200 VET policy-makers, VET providers, social partners, representatives of sector organisations and researchers. Member States continue to be active: they are looking at examples of good practice, finding their own solutions, developing proposals and working with established and new networks.

The 2012 forum focused on how to use the current ECVET initiatives, projects and networking activities to create a more reliable, resourceful and sustainable model of cooperation by 2014. This could help to support the establishment of an ECVET community of practice.

The forum began with a discussion between the Director of Lifelong Learning: policies and programme at the European Commission, Antonio Silva Mendes, the Acting Director of Cedefop, Christian F. Lettmayr and a representative from an employers' organisation, Stéphane Rivière (President of A.N.F.A., automobile services sector, in France). In this discussion, the participants considered questions and issues affecting the further development of ECVET.

**We are in the middle of a serious economic crisis, why would stakeholders care about ECVET?**

**Antonio Silva Mendes:** We are experiencing economic and financial problems. And Europe is faced with real challenges in term of employment, especially in relation to young people's unemployment. This creates a need for the education and training sector to play its part in creating solutions. We need to transform the way we work in the education sector and this crisis has to be the catalyst for change. We need quick answers and these will come through working with a wide range of stakeholders in the education and business environment. As well as high levels of unemployment, there is a significant mismatch between the skills that potential employees offer and the skills that are in demand from employers. This is not only a question of geography it is also a question of the competence required for the job.

What can we do to help to solve this problem? We know that if we can increase levels of competence, we will make a real impact. The launch of "One step up" is one initiative in adult edu-

cation that can help. Based on a "peer learning" model it aims to help people acquire at least one additional qualification during their working lives. If we could give everybody one extra competence, it would be a great help for those who are currently unemployed. Another important step is encouraging mobility – this helps individuals to improve their language skills, develop their "soft skills" and gain greater experience of different ways of working. The third important step is recognising the competence that people have or acquire while training or learning - and this is part of the reason for our forum in Brussels.

### How can we be sure that ECVET will have the desired effect?

**Christian F. Lettmayr:** Mr. Mendes has already emphasised the urgency of the current situation. ECVET is one of the European instruments that can help to increase the recognition of competences. But we need to make quicker progress. As Mr. Mendes said, this crisis provides us with an opportunity to consider more drastic changes than before. We should use this opportunity to make rapid progress with all the European instruments, particularly those that use the learning outcomes approach on which ECVET is based.

If we want systems to change, we have to ensure that all the European instruments support each other. The next phase of implementation is very important as this is when we demonstrate the added value of ECVET and the benefits for citizens throughout Europe. However we know that successful implementation requires practical and visible actions if we are to demonstrate the benefits to

learners. If we succeed in this, it will be a huge step forward.

We have to keep in mind the demographic situation. The needs of the labour market do not just relate to qualifications for young people entering the labour market, they also include improvements in the skills of those who are already in work.

The implementation phase of ECVET will be successful if the needs of employers are met and there are reliable, valid and accurate processes for validating learners' achievement.

### From the point of view of the French automobile services sector, what is the added value of ECVET?

**Stéphane Rivière:** ECVET can help to recognise young people's learning and the acquisition of competences from a mobility programme. For example in the field of motorcycle mechanics, one of our schools sends its trainees to Britain. At the moment they do not have this experience recognised in their qualification but we want this to change. We want to make these changes across the whole of the European vocational training sector.

ECVET can also support lifelong learning. By creating modules, with the social partners, we can help learners to move sideways at work (e.g. retraining from employment in the bike repair sector to the car repair sector) as well as progress to a supervisory or managerial role.

### Could you say more about mobility - not geographic mobility but other types of mobility?

**Antonio Silva Mendes:** The example Mr. Rivière has just given stresses the need to work closely with business and industry. A.N.F.A's participation in this event is particularly welcome, not just because we know qualifications and training are better when we work together, but because we need to be able to identify and define the new competences required by the labour market. And we need to organise work placements and at the end of the day students need jobs!

Even though there have been changes over the past 20 years in industry, they have not been as drastic as those currently being experienced. The skills and competences needed by employers are changing fast and employees need to continually update and upgrade their skills. This is even more necessary if they wish to move to more demanding roles that require high levels of training. To support learners, we need to develop smoother progression routes, both within VET and also from VET to higher education and vice versa.

Skilled employees and VET learners are increasingly mobile from both a technical and educational perspective. Mobility can help people to acquire the right skills to prepare themselves to work in a new environment. The Member States have agreed to increase mobility in VET so that six per cent of all learners can benefit. Currently the figure is nearer to three per cent so there is much more to do. ECVET is one of the European instruments that can help mobility. In a

financial environment where funding is tight, we need to use all the available measures to support mobility.

**Stéphane Rivière:** For companies to be persuaded to show interest in ECVET, they need to be assured that employees who spend time abroad develop the same or similar skills to those who remain at home e.g. mobile learners from France must be able to guarantee that their experiences in Germany, Finland or the UK gives them the skills needed when they return to France. Companies have their part to play – they need to recognise employees' skills acquired through qualifications obtained abroad. This is the key to success.

### How can ECVET be more attractive to the labour market?

**Christian F. Lettmayr:** Mobility can involve time spent abroad but it can also involve movement across sectors within a country. For example, in the Austrian apprenticeship system in the 1970s and 1980s there was a great deal of specialisation in individual enterprises. Apprentices were not able to demonstrate all the necessary skills for a particular qualification in one company. VET providers had to find other ways to provide them with these skills. In an ECVET context, skills acquired in different places and at different employers can be recognised and validated – leading to a much more flexible system.

For those in employment, improving or simply up-dating their skill is necessary to sustain their employability. Within the company, employers' skills are automatically recognised - but if the company closes, employees need to demonstrate

their skills and competences through qualifications. Acquiring and validating new skills is important for employees. If the qualifications are defined in terms of units, it is often easier to acquire these qualifications.

However there are some risks. One danger is the temptation for learners to only acquire part of a qualification. Even if they find employment at the beginning of their career, they will experience significant disadvantages if they re-enter the labour market later in their career. We should not be satisfied when learners do not complete their initial VET qualifications.

A second danger is that some combinations of units may not be recognised as a qualification and may not offer access to higher levels of education or training. Learners need good advice to ensure their selection of units leads to qualifications.

### Do you have any concluding words on the challenges that would face a community of practice?

**Antonio Silva Mendes:** We need convincing messages because citizens expect an efficient and rapid response to the current situation. And VET has significant responsibility in the field of employment. We need to concentrate our efforts and avoid a plethora of new ideas and a disparate set of activities. All Member States can align their efforts at the VET provider level in order to develop an environment where achievement is recognised at a national level. We need to encourage and support more active participation from businesses. This will help VET providers to develop

new curricula that meet the skills and competences needed for the future.

Strong cooperation is essential and the European Commission will act as a facilitator. We should remember that we are not doing this for our own benefit but for the citizens of Europe.

**Stéphane Rivière:** Social partners in the automobile services sector have created a national directory of qualifications and certificates that are based on units. To develop this unit-based approach the sector has worked very closely with social partners to identify the competences and criteria that underpin each trade. In relation to ECVET, I think the next challenge is to analyse the characteristics of jobs in each country and identify where there are common expectations.

**Christian F. Lettmayr:** The European Commission and Cedefop are facilitators in this process. It is only when the European instruments are valued and accepted by citizens and companies that they become a reality and citizens are able to see the benefits we expect. Much has been done e.g. in November 2011 we organised a large conference for social partners which had a positive impact and reflected significant interest in this process. Many countries have already developed some good examples. One way of making faster progress is to share and adapt these successful examples. A community of practice is the right way to do this and I am sure the next two days will assist this process of mutual learning.

## PRESENTATIONS

Isabelle Le Mouillour

# The development of ECVET across Europe: Cedefop's 2011

## Introduction

Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, is a strategic partner to the European Commission, the Member States and the social partners within the European ECVET governance arrangements. Cedefop, in cooperation with the European Commission is mandated to periodically review the implementation of ECVET in Europe and two reports have been published<sup>1</sup>. Cedefop's analysis focuses on political and contextual factors in the development of ECVET and the strategies for implementation across Europe. Our analysis is based on interviews with the ECVET Users Group and a review of the published materials including policy documents.

This 2012 forum offers Cedefop an opportunity to present some of the results from the 2011 monitoring exercise. This includes information on the progress that has been made since 2009. So far, our comparative analysis has identified three main issues:

- a positive attitude to ECVET across Europe;
- a high level of ECVET readiness;
- the range of objectives that have been attributed to ECVET.

ECVET is not straightforward to implement as it relates to fundamental aspects of VET systems such as unitisa-

tion, recognition, validation, a learning outcomes approach, qualification and assessment standards, and a possible modified understanding of qualifications. Our interviews revealed a positive attitude towards ECVET in national VET contexts. The interviews also showed that stakeholders were taking advantage of the testing and experimenting phase that ends in 2012<sup>2</sup>.

There is a high level of ECVET readiness across Europe. ECVET readiness can be defined in terms of the feasibility of implementation when considered in relation to different aspects of the VET and qualifications systems.

Two studies<sup>3</sup> have already considered how much progress Member States have made in relation to working with learning outcomes, modules, validation of mobility etc. Cedefop's monitoring has considered readiness by identifying weaknesses and strengths of VET systems from an ECVET perspective. Whereas European VET systems show a general state of readiness, some countries are hesitating over whether to introduce credit systems in VET. These hesitations arise when the added value of ECVET is difficult to identify. Questions being asked include "What does ECVET provide that VET systems do not already have?" and "Where validation or credit systems are already operating, what are the advantages of using ECVET?" ECVET

added-value has to be a key issue in our workshop discussions.

ECVET is being tested and implemented in relation to initial and continuing VET, at all levels of the EQF (European Qualifications Framework) and in various sectors. It is interesting to observe that the main reason Member States agreed to develop ECVET was to support European mobility and the acquisition of new skills and competences. A secondary consideration was ECVET's ability to support recognition, validation and all elements of lifelong learning. This poses some challenges for ECVET as a model: Is ECVET fit for all these different purposes? What are ECVET's main strengths? Is it a good model? And if it is, to what extent is it good? How could the ECVET model as set out in the European Recommendation be improved?

## Why implement ECVET?

Our interviews revealed that the main reason for implementing ECVET was to support European mobility. The second reason was to encourage permeability i.e. the movement of learners from one level of qualifications to the next one, from one vocational field to another, and from initial VET to continuing VET or from initial VET to higher education. The third reason related to the recognition and validation of achievement; this is likely to be an on-going issue because there is a need to improve the synergy

(1) Cedefop (2011). The development of ECVET in Europe (2010). Working paper No 14. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union [www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6110\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6110_en.pdf); Cedefop (2012).

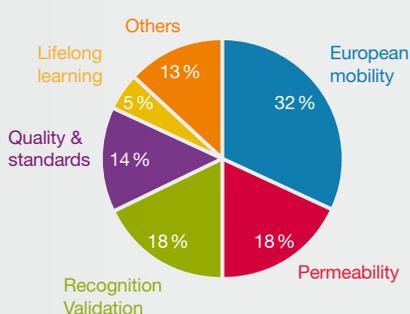
(2) This phase is part of the ECVET agenda as foreseen in the ECVET Recommendation.

(2) ECVET reflector ([http://www.include.ecvet.de/ecvet/downloads/ECVET\\_Final\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.include.ecvet.de/ecvet/downloads/ECVET_Final_Report_EN.pdf)), ECVET connexion ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc171\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc171_en.pdf)).(2006)

# monitoring exercise

between ECVET and validation systems. We have to find a way to respond to this in each Member State – and it is a question for everyone. ECVET and validation are different processes and there is a need for greater alignment. This will also be discussed during the forum workshops. The fourth reason for developing ECVET relates to improving quality and standards. Implementing ECVET has encouraged greater reflection on how qualifications are built, the extent to which qualifications are flexible, and the quality criteria used to support their development. This reflection is changing the way ECVET is considered as it becomes more integrated into the development of qualifications and curricula.

Reasons for implementing ECVET



## Which activities have been used to implement ECVET?

Cedefop's 2010 monitoring of ECVET identified eight activities that supported implementation (see annexe 1 for an overview of activities in each country).

The 2011 monitoring exercise has confirmed the 'popularity' of some of these activities:

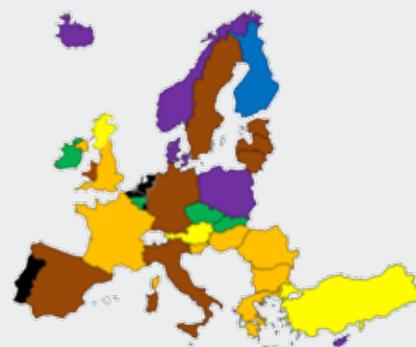
- The most widespread activity is participation in European projects (more than 200 ECVET related projects are funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme). Some European projects are running without European funds;
- The second most popular activity is the provision of information to stakeholders in Member States. This includes activities led by the ECVET network; the ECVET secretariat; and workshops, seminars and the distribution of publications by the European Commission and Cedefop. Even when stakeholders in ministries or professional associations hesitate, they are involved in ECVET dissemination through the use of web sites, seminars and European-wide cooperation;
- The third most popular type of activity relates to technical and legislative aspects of ECVET. These include reflections on regulations, the design and structure of qualifications, the organisation of the qualification system, the role of stakeholders and how to locate ECVET in a national qualifications framework;
- The fourth activity involves the completion of an impact analysis. This includes using a cost-benefit analysis to compare the reforms against the added value and advantages of using

ECVET. This activity is sometimes embedded in national projects or initiatives which are experimenting with using ECVET;

- The last type of activity is more of a "wait and see" attitude. This approach was more common one year ago than now. However there is a more active "wait and see" phase in some countries with people attending informal meetings and spreading information among their colleagues.

Clearly progress has been achieved in the last two years. The following figure indicates the density of ECVET activities by countries. This ranges from Finland which has developed seven strategies or lines of actions and Portugal, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein and Belgium Flanders where one line of action is being developed.

Reasons for implementing ECVET



Number of lines of action



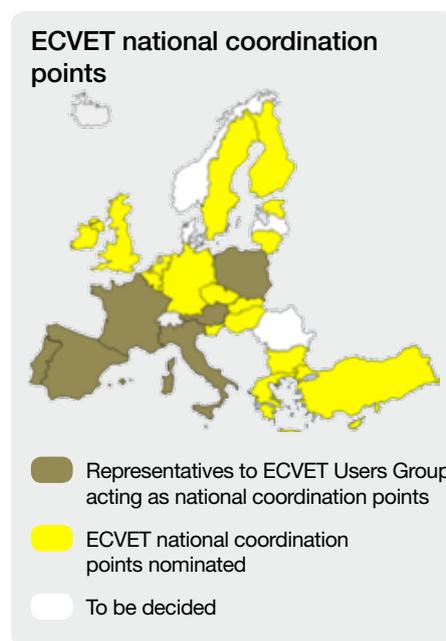
### What progress has there been with infrastructure?

In all European countries, ministries (in most cases, the ministries in charge of education) include ECVET in their portfolio of activities. Staff have been assigned to support ECVET implementation and they are supported by policy makers and VET providers. ECVET decision and strategy papers have been prepared and considered. And ECVET is being discussed within national working groups that focus on the European education and training agenda. Many European and national ECVET projects have established contact with ministries and decision-makers.

Starting in 2010, and now fully operational, the institutional ECVET infrastructure includes new partners – often called brokerage organisations that link VET providers to ministries, regional to national authorities etc. These brokerage organisations are the National Coordination Points (sometimes called National Contact Points or even contact persons.) They are in charge of ECVET in the Member States and include the National Agencies for Lifelong Learning which provides finance for ECVET projects. Some of them include ECVET as a national priority and support a network of ECVET experts. At the European level there is an ECVET team which acts as the key organiser and moderator of the European ECVET network.

The ECVET Recommendation did not foresee the establishment of National Coordination Points (NCP). In most European countries, a single organisation is responsible for EQAVET, ECVET and EQF – they often work closely with mi-

nistries. This provides a good opportunity for developing synergies between these European instruments. There are now 23 NCPs. In six countries there is no NCP but representatives of the ECVET Users Group act as contacts. In a few countries the establishment of a NCP is under discussion.



### Evolution or revolution?

Implementing ECVET raises questions about whether other adaptations and changes to the existing education and training systems are needed. Cedefop's analysis shows that ECVET can be seen as a coherent and logical step in the development of national or regional initiatives to modernise systems.

Introducing ECVET provides benefits in most countries. These arise from a range of developments including the revision of the standards that support qualifications (e.g. in Latvia and Romania) and the development of modularisation and unitisation as a basis for developing curricula and qualifications

(e.g. in Estonia since 2005 and more recently in Luxembourg). ECVET's learning outcomes approach has been integrated into the development of some National Qualification Frameworks (e.g. in Hungary and Poland).

The development of ECVET is being supported through the testing of pilot initiatives such as DECVET in Germany and FINECVET in Finland. As a result of this activity, there is a large reservoir of experience that can be drawn on, e.g. the ECVET network can benefit from colleagues' experiences of developing validation arrangements in most European countries and operating credit-based VET systems (e.g. in Sweden, Denmark and Scotland).

ECVET is perceived as requiring many changes to legal and regulatory arrangements. Cedefop's analysis has identified that many countries changed their legislation in 2003 and 2004 when ECVET was conceptualised. As a result, many of the elements that underpin ECVET (such as learning outcomes, transfer and recognition, modularisation or unitisation) are already covered by the legislation. It is more a matter of allowing time for legislation to have an impact on the VET system. In most contexts, it can take five years to change the legislation and a further five years to introduce changes. Consequently in those countries where a change to legislation is required, whenever possible the preference is to focus on operational changes rather than legislative changes in order to implement ECVET.

### Where is the best place to start when implementing ECVET?

Cedefop organised a series of interviews to support the 2011 monitoring exercise. These highlighted the difficulty of identifying the best starting point for ECVET implementation. The interviewees were able to rank in order of priority the issues that needed to be addressed:

- the learning outcomes approach to qualifications. Interviewees indicated that learning outcomes had to be written in a way that allowed them to be adapted during a period of mobility. Learning outcomes needed to take account of various contexts: the curriculum, the qualification and the validation process;
- the development of units which were based on learning outcomes. Units needed to be considered in relation to the qualifications which will make use of them, the assessment approaches which would be used and the mechanisms for recognising the learning outcomes;
- the development and use of common templates which underpin agreements between stakeholders and identify the quality criteria and quality assurance approaches that should be used.

### The main challenges facing the implementation of ECVET

Decision-makers, practitioners, VET experts, national and regional ECVET communities are experiencing three main challenges:

- convincing education and training stakeholders of the added value and comparative advantage of ECVET. Even though ECVET's rationale is explained in many European publications, VET providers, regional authorities, representatives of Chambers of Commerce and many other stakeholders still need to be convinced. One way forward could be to identify a more systematic set of lessons from the European and national ECVET projects. The development of a convincing argument and narrative needs to be embedded in discussions around a cultural shift towards parity of esteem between different education and training pathways;
- resources - in the current financial environment there are a number of competing reform agendas. In some countries it is difficult to develop simultaneously the national qualifications framework, validation systems and ECVET;
- the need to write qualifications and units based on learning outcomes, to adapt assessment and recognition procedures and assure quality. However progress is being made e.g. the European Skills, Competences and Occupations taxonomy; the development of national qualifications frameworks; and lessons are being learnt from pilot projects. Nevertheless, the practical challenges are significant.

These three challenges can be translated into conditions that need to be in place to implement ECVET<sup>1</sup>. Following discussions with the ECVET Users Group, 15 conditions for success have been identified and clustered in six main items as follows:

- **argumentation:** there is a need to present a clear view of ECVET's added value and this needs to be effectively communicated;
- **commitment:** support is needed from ministries, chambers of commerce, sector-based organisations and representative groups;
- **capacity building:** the system's capacity needs to be enhanced through a clear legislative and regulatory framework;
- **a greater understanding of qualifications:** including how they fit into a national qualifications framework and how they are designed in relation to learning outcomes;
- **learning outcomes:** including how to design and create units, how to assess students' achievement of learning outcomes, and how to recognise and validate achievement based on learning outcomes;
- **cross border cooperation:** the need to use European templates to support and promote learners' mobility.

Cedefop will soon start to collect data for the next monitoring exercise. This will consider how much progress has been made in introducing these necessary conditions.

#### The content roadmap:

##### Where to start with ECVET ?



Credits	11 %
Standards	13 %
ECVET units	18 %
Learning outcomes	22 %
Guidelines	3 %
Mobility	3 %
Curricula	3 %
Assessment	7 %
Other priorities	8 %
Agreements templates	10 %

(1) Cedefop (2012). Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/19848.aspx>

**Annexe 1: Overview of ECVET activities**

	Broad range initiative	Impact analysis	Updating regulations	Adapting qualifications system	Wait and see	Combine with NQF	ECVET European projects	Informing stakeholders
Austria		X 2008		X		X	X	X 2011
Belgium Flanders					X			
Belgium Wallonia	X	X	X	X			X	X
Bulgaria			X	X 2012			X	X 2010
Cyprus	P		D			X		X
Czech Republic	X 2009	X 2008		P		X	X 2009	X 2008
Denmark		D						X
Estonia			X				X	X
Finland	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
France		X	D				X	X
Germany	X 2007						X	X
Greece			X 2010	X 2011		X 2010	X	
Hungary				X 2006, 2011		X 2008	X 2008	
Iceland*			X				X	
Ireland	P	X	X	X		X	X	
Italy			X 2005	X 2008			X	
Latvia				X 2013		X	X	
Liechtenstein					X			
Lithuania			X 2007	X 2010		X 2010		
Luxembourg				X				
Malta	X 2011	X 2011-13	X 2005	X			X 2011	X 2011
Netherlands							X	
Norway					X		X	
Poland					X	X		
Portugal								X
Romania			X 2011	X		X	X	
Slovak Republic	X 2011	X 2013	X	D		X 2011	X	
Slovenia	X 2011		X 2006	X			X	
Spain	X				X		X	
Sweden						D	X	X
UK-England		X*				X	X	X
UK-Wales					X		X	
UK-Northern Ireland						X	X	X
UK-Scotland			X			X	X	X
Turkey			X 2010-12	X 2007-13		X 2008-13	X 2008-13	X 2011-13

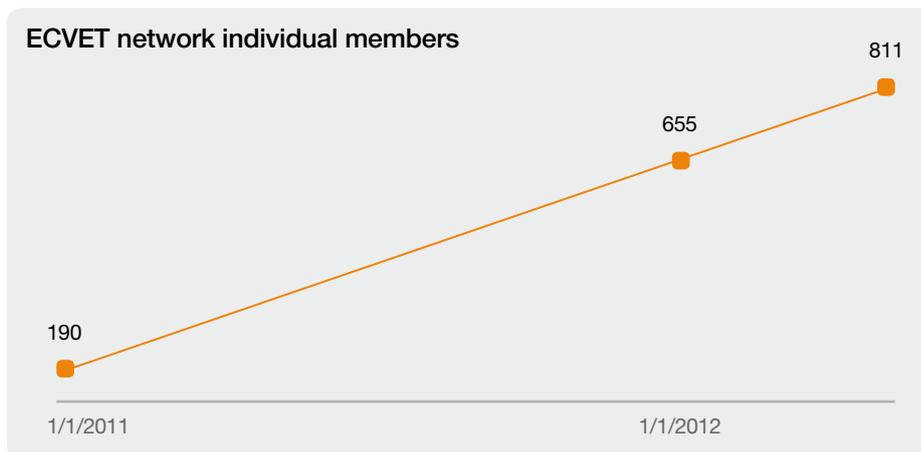
Source: Cedefop (2012). The development of ECVET in Europe (2011). Working paper No 14. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union;  
 D = under discussion; P = planned;  
 \* data for 2010.

# ECVET Network News

The ECVET network offers the basis for a potential ECVET community of practice. It currently has 360 organisational members and 811 individual members, and the number of individual members has increased fourfold in the last 18 months.

The membership reflects the wide range of parties in Europe with an interest in VET: almost 25 per cent are VET providers, another 25 per cent are involved in qualification design, and a further 25 per cent are organisations with an interest in assessment. The final group of organisational members include those involved in learner guidance, awarding qualifications and employers.

As well as attracting members, a community of practice has to set out its range of activities. On behalf of the European Commission, the ECVET secretariat already offers a number of activities such as:



**1** Information seminars (from early 2011 to May 2012) for all VET organisations seeking a better understanding of ECVET in a national context. So far four information seminars have been held.

	Number of participants	Number of countries
London	20	5
Vienna	26	5
Amsterdam	34	9
Budapest	27	7

**2** Seminars for those wishing to use ECVET to underpin geographical mobility. The participants have included schools and training centres; sector representatives involved in mobility; and organisations that promote and support mobility.

So far two seminars have been held:

	Number of participants	Number of countries
Lisbon	23	9
Bonn	29	11

**3** Customised seminars (from early 2011 to May 2012) where members of the network can request support from the ECVET team as part of a strategic approach to implementation. The ECVET team's response includes explanations of the 'political' and technical aspects of ECVET as well as support for regional, national and sectorial activities, such as: organising seminars for targeted audiences, e.g. seminars for managers of national vocational training systems or managers in a particular sector at a European level; or assisting network members to organise information sessions.

So far four customised seminars have been held:

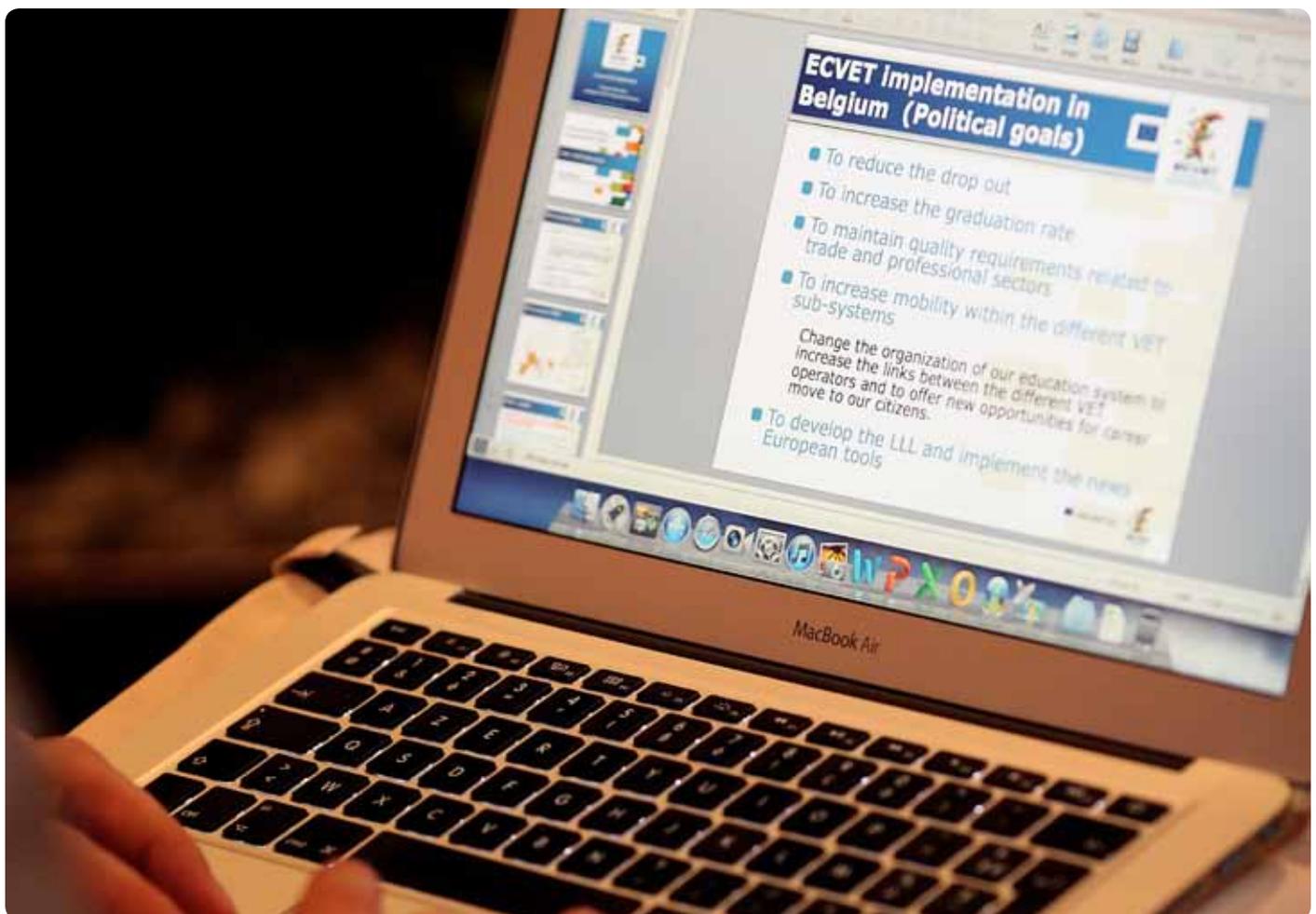
	Number of participants
Belgium (Fr) Ministry of Education	64
France - Ministries and Awarding Bodies	26
Romania Ministry of Education	52
France - Employers	102

Planned seminars in 2012 include:

	Type	Date
Warsaw	Customised Poland	July
Brussels	Customised UEAPME	11 September
Milan	Mobility	19-21 September
Paris	Joint seminar ECVET/EQAVET/EQF	1-2 October
To be confirmed	Customised Switzerland	December
To be confirmed	ECVET and ECTS	November
Helsinki	Customised for Nordic and Baltic countries	November
To be confirmed	Information for VET designers	December

Some projects are looking at the potential for an ECVET community of practice. Last February, an ECVET conference looked at the findings from a number of three year pilot projects. This conference included discussion on the outcomes, the obstacles, and examples of good practice. A summary of the conference proceedings is included in ECVET's Magazine number 9-2012.)

And finally we should acknowledge the large number of mobility projects that are already using ECVET principles. Coordinated by NetECVET, these projects are providing very useful information which can be used and adapted by others who wish to use ECVET to support mobility.



# Round table discussion

Supported by Alison Crabb and Erik Hess, European Commission, DG EAC



## Introduction

There are a number of initiatives that support the development of an ECVET community of practice, e.g. the forthcoming “Erasmus for All” programme and the creation of national teams of ECVET experts. Alison Crabb and Erik Hess led a discussion and information session on the idea of a community of practice. This plenary session was introduced by two videos from “You Tube”:

- the first video introduced ‘Erasmus for All’ which has been proposed by the European Commission on 23 November 2011. It was clear that this programme could provide a response to the funding problems facing a growing number of mobility schemes. More information is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/Erasmus-for-all/>
- the second video looked at some of the ECVET technical specifications including the use of a Memorandum of Understanding. This video is particularly useful for those who are new to ECVET. A copy can be found at: <http://www.ecvet-team.eu/fr/content/documentation-forum-2012>

Through a series of questions, the “Erasmus for All” programme was further explained by Alison Crabb.

**Erasmus for All is the future EU programme for education, training, youth and sport proposed by the European Commission. Could you tell us more about the objectives of the programme, and why the decision was made to merge some previous programmes?**

*Erasmus for All* proposes to bring together youth, training, formal, informal and non-formal education, international cooperation and sport. It offers three key actions: learning mobility, cooperation for innovation and developing good practice, and support for policy reform. After several decades of experience of Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Youth and other programmes, we know that learning is the common goal of many activities supported by European programmes. We can see that different learning sectors are cooperating more

- our objective is to offer a programme which reflects this.

## What is the connection with ECVET?

I think there are two things to note, both of which demonstrate interesting developments in VET at a European level:

- firstly there is a proposal related to “Sector Skills Alliances”. This targeted action supports cooperation in addressing skill mismatches in order to ensure that VET systems provide the skills required by the labour market. We are looking for “win-win” solutions which increase competitiveness as well as learners’ employability. “Sector Skills Alliances” can promote cooperation between the world of education and training; develop sector-specific expertise; and work with those authorities who are involved in policy-making or decision-making for education and training systems. The core of the action is to identify the skills needs for the sector. Based on evidence, the “Sector Skills Alliances” will design and produce joint curricula and set out a range of teaching

and learning methods which provide learners with the skills required by the labour market. Our overall goal is to have a more systemic impact on training.

The call for pilot projects is focused on five sectors: automobile, aeronautics, health care, tourism, and sustainable energy including construction. More information is available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/calls/s0112\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/calls/s0112_en.htm)

- the second new aspect of *Erasmus for All* relates to mobility. In terms of volume, the objective is to double the number of participating VET learners, as well as to increase the number of participating staff. In terms of quality (where ECVET can play an important role), the objective is to make mobility part of the overall strategy of participating institutions. Mobility should not be based on a single "pioneer" member of staff; we really want to make an impact on the whole institution.

### **Will a quota be set for VET mobility?**

In the proposal from the European Commission, a minimum percentage of the budget is assigned to individual education sectors (VET, higher education etc...). At the moment the percentage assigned to VET includes funding for adult education and is 17 per cent. The percentage assigned to higher education is 25 per cent. In relation to "learning mobility", the proposal is to direct around 60 per cent of budget to this activity. We should note that the budget is still under discussion.

### **Should young learners be sent abroad?**

Yes. Many organisations have years of experience with Comenius and Leonar-

do da Vinci. They know that once learning outcomes are set and the right framework is in place, mobility can provide young learners with a good quality experience. While mobility must give learners an experience that is compatible and valued in their national systems, the benefits for young learners can be very convincing.

### **Are there study visits in the future programme?**

Study visits are not included in the European Commission proposal. However the proposal includes measures which support staff and their professional mobility e.g. job shadowing, teaching, experiencing different forms of learning.

### **How can mobility be promoted to encourage more VET students to go abroad?**

Demand from learners is already high. The funding needed to support this demand already exceeds the available budget by 100 per cent. But are we sure that workplaces are ready to receive more trainees? It is important to promote the benefits of mobility, not only for participating learners, but also for their home institutions and for the host workplaces. We also have to stress the connection to ECVET, explaining the value of using learning outcomes, and the need to ensure that learning meets the expectations of the learners' curricula. This is the challenge for VET policy makers.

### **Why is cooperation with 3<sup>rd</sup> countries available to the higher education sector and not to VET?**

VET systems are more diverse than

higher education systems. This makes well-structured cooperation with third country institutions more of a challenge. It is mainly for this reason that cooperation with third countries is not yet available to VET.

**Through a second series of questions, the role of the national teams of ECVET experts was further explained by Erik Hess. The questions arose in response to the European Commission's call for proposals to create these national teams.**

### **What will be the role of the experts?**

The role of the national experts is to bridge the gap between the policy level where national authorities, social partners and others work on ECVET implementation and those individuals who work in VET institutions. Trainers and training providers need materials that are easy to use. The guidelines and templates must be easy to understand and suitable for an audience that is not as well informed as people in this forum. There is a real danger that those individuals in VET organisations who will put ECVET into practice do not understand what we are talking about.

We have to modify our materials in order to meet the needs of trainers in companies, individuals in VET providers and the learners. The national teams of ECVET experts will be attached to the Lifelong Learning Programme's National Agencies, and they will contribute to the adoption, implementation and use of ECVET. They will provide information and give advice to promoters (schools, companies etc.). They will organise seminars, workshops, launch information

campaigns and modify guidance so it can easily be understood by all.

### **A question about a possible road map: what is the plan?**

This is a restricted call for proposals. There is no specific roadmap in place. In making this call in the VET area, we were inspired by the success story of the Bologna experts in the higher education sector. This is a two year call under the Lifelong Learning Programme - we expect the proposals to address technical issues in an activity plan overseen by the National Agencies.

### **How will the European coordination be done?**

It is not our intention to set up a governance body. Our governance arrangements are already in place - the ECVET Users Group - many of whom are here today. We have linked the national teams of ECVET experts to National Agencies so they can support the success of ECVET implementation through project funding.

At a European level, there is close cooperation with social partners and Mem-

ber States. This is helping us to produce guidance, users' guides, and templates for a Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement. One task for the national teams of ECVET experts is to use this information in their national context.

### **Can ECVET experts come from a range of backgrounds, including the business world?**

Decisions on national experts are made at a national level. It would not be appropriate for us to decide on individuals. Individuals from the business world may well have an excellent background for this role.

### **How can the quality of the experts be assured?**

When we prepared the restricted call, we included some criteria so that the experts are able to support ECVET implementation. But we also provided flexibility to allow the selectors to choose the most suitable people in order to meet national, regional or sectorial needs. I would stress that we are at the start of a process and we are learning and listening to feedback.

### **Will there be an EU evaluation of the whole project (e.g. an assessment of what has been delivered by each team of experts)?**

There is no plan for an assessment – it will be part of the global evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme. However, the National Agencies will have to prove they have delivered what they intended to do in the activity plan. The executive agency will assess progress and the final reports that are submitted by the National Agencies.

### **You mentioned the need to simplify. How?**

At a European level we are working in a wide range of areas where different instruments are being developed: e.g. we have the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and ECVET. This has led to numerous contacts points (national reference points, national coordination points etc.) There is much to gain from greater synergy. We can reflect on the advantages of the merger of different coordination points. This is for Member States to consider as they reflect on the need to create a simplified approach at the national level.

Other questions were submitted to the European Commission officials. Due to the time constraints, it was not possible to answer all of them during the forum. All the unanswered questions have been sent to the European Commission for comment.





**Thematic session 1:  
The challenges  
for an ECVET community  
of practice**

The ECVET forum provides a place to exchange views, explore and extend existing networks, and challenge colleagues and peers. The emergence of good practice, new solutions, ideas and strategies being developed throughout Europe can help participants to think about their own approaches and policies. The forum also provided opportunities for discussion and active participation in on-going debates. These thematic sessions provided time for these debates – they offered an opportunity for detailed conversations with peers on some of the key ECVET implementation challenges.

The thematic sessions were organised around a series of workshops. Participants at the forum were invited to attend three workshops, each of which was supported by one or more facilitators.

The thematic session on the first day focused on ECVET and its implementation. These discussions provided information which would support conversations on the second day – namely how best to organise future collaboration within an ECVET community of practice.

On the first day, there were four workshops:

- ECVET as a multiplier for geographical learning and mobility;
- ECVET as a multiplier for lifelong learning;
- Sharing the added value of ECVET;
- Moving to the effective implementation of ECVET.

## WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

# Workshop 1: ECVET as a multiplier for geographical learning and mobility

Facilitators: Alexandra Costa Artur and Segundo Gonzales

Introduction by Sibilla Drews from the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training in Germany

*“ECVET is intended to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification. This will improve the general understanding of citizens learning outcomes and their transparency, transnational mobility and portability across (...) Member States in a borderless lifelong learning area.”<sup>1</sup>*



In short, *“thanks to ECVET, it should be easier to fully integrate mobility into learners’ learning pathways and to make visible and recognised what they have learnt abroad.”<sup>2</sup>* ECVET is essential to supporting learning mobility as well as contributing to the employability of young people and improving the overall quality of education. ECVET is thus one of the European instruments and principles<sup>3</sup> that contribute to the European benchmark of at least six per cent of 18-34 year olds with an initial VET qualification taking part in a mobility opportunity by 2020<sup>4</sup>.

This workshop focused on geographical mobility and learning. Participants were invited to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of ECVET for organising and running mobility schemes based on their experiences with ECVET, operating mobility projects or working with mobile VET learners. The workshop aimed to identify key issues that could be addressed by a community of practice.

Sibilla Drews from the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training in Germany introduced the topic on behalf of NetECVET<sup>5</sup>. NetECVET had identified that approximately 60 per cent of mobility promoters had heard about

(1) Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18/6/2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for VET. Official journal of the European Union, C 155, 8.7.2009 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>)

(2) European Commission (2011). Using ECVET for Geographical Mobility. Part II of the ECVET user’s Guide. [http://www.ecvet-team.eu/sites/default/files/2011-08-02\\_ecvet\\_users\\_guide\\_mobility-final.pdf](http://www.ecvet-team.eu/sites/default/files/2011-08-02_ecvet_users_guide_mobility-final.pdf)

(3) Cedefop briefing note on the European tools and principles for lifelong learning (2011) at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/19146.aspx>.

(4) Council of the European Union (2011). Council conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility. Brussels, 28 and 29 November 2011

(5) Behind the NetECVET project is a group of 14 National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme, coordinated by the German National Agency. It aims at supporting practitioners of transnational mobility who are beginning to work with ECVET.

ECVET and they had positive views and expectations about ECVET and the use of learning outcomes. Their level of knowledge and practical experience was often limited. A large majority of mobility promoters were interested in attending an information event.

The value of ECVET in relation to geographical learning and mobility was clear to mobility promoters. They expected to be involved in the standardisation of units which could underpin mobility and the development of European training standards. NetECVET found that VET providers consider transparency and comparability of qualifications a precondition for creating a European education area. The ability to recognise and transfer learning changes many peoples' attitude towards mobility (the learning outcomes approach makes it easier to understand how to achieve a qualification) and this has a positive impact on the labour market. There was consensus that effective quality assurance fosters an acceptance of mobility from companies, and using a Memorandum of Understanding and a Learning Agreement actively encourage partner organisations to engage in detailed and extensive conversations which lead to agreements on content and teaching and learning methods.

NetECVET also identified obstacles facing mobility promoters. These included the additional efforts that are required to ensure barriers to effective implementation are overcome (bureaucracy, investment of time etc.) It also included the challenges associated with working in a very diverse VET environment where the systems used in other countries were complex and time was needed

to understand them fully. In particular understanding assessment and certification systems was challenging, and was not helped when there was a lack of support from national, regional and local authorities. The technical nature of ECVET terminology also created a language barrier which could be reduced by a more standard and simplified set of terms.

Following the introduction from Sibilla Drews, the workshop participants discussed ECVET as a way of organising mobility schemes for learners. The following is a summary of this discussion and the comments are organised under four headings:

- what is working well?
- what is not working well?
- what should be improved?
- what we need?

### What is working well

The views of participants can best be summarised in the phrase "the journey has begun." Learning outcomes were considered to be essential as they make clear what needs to be done in mobility. Some participants referred to the creation of "a common language because of the use of learning outcomes" and this has allowed barriers to be overcome.

Learners' awareness continues to rise, there is a growing demand from learners to be involved in mobility, face to face contact with teachers is working well and many of the core instruments and tools needed to make mobility a success are in place. There is a shift towards a more systemic approach to mobility which goes beyond a series of mobility projects.

There is a strong desire and enthusiasm for a more structured approach to VET mobility. While "using a Memorandum of Understanding and a Learning Agreement take time, they do enable partners to offer successful experiences for learners with an increase in quality and a better opportunity to promote mobility. A Memorandum of Understanding leads to projects being more sustainable (while regular reviews are needed, ECVET allows you to use approaches and materials that have been developed previously.)"

For mobility based on ECVET to succeed there was a need for a 'bottom up' approach with a minimum level of bureaucracy. Some participants consider ECVET network activities as their community of practice. "Attending workshops and seminars enables me to get a good overview of different stakeholders and their projects. This influences my work at home."

### What is not working so well

The impact of ECVET's ability to support learners' mobility can be weakened by the following:

- a lack of information for employers, VET providers and competent bodies. In some sectors this lack of involvement and information creates a lack of interest from companies;
- the diversity of VET systems across Europe. The curriculum content is very different and not all VET systems refer to the EQF. The differences in culture, values, beliefs, traditions, work ethics and legislation (e.g. health and safety) are numerous and there is no common approach. Even within the same country there are sometimes different

VET systems and expectations from companies. However as one participant warned *“On the other hand, establishing one common European VET system would require that every Member State adheres to it, and that would be another challenge”*;

- the lack of political commitment;
- the absence of a sustainable level of funding – based on a common vision and political willpower;
- an effective marketing strategy which emphasises how ECVET can provide a multiplier effect for mobility;
- a lack of mutual trust between partners in relation to assessment. There is a need to quality assure the assessment of learning outcomes as the lack of agreed assessment criteria makes it difficult to assess learning outcomes during a period of mobility. As a consequence learners face difficulty in gaining recognition for the learning outcomes acquired abroad. This leads to inequality and a perception of unfair treatment for students. This lack of mutual trust affects the duration of mobility as promoters prefer a shorter period as they are not sure of the benefit of the mobility. (This is only one of the reasons for the short term duration of mobility, the age of participants and the fact that they are sometimes paid by companies also has an influence);
- the ECVET credit point system remains “a mystery” for some users. Credit points are often seen as unnecessary. Some participants regretted the lack of a common understanding on credit points, and felt that it was hard to define the number of credits to attribute to each part of a qualification.

### **On what should be improved**

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) need support to implement ECVET, especially in relation to the administrative burdens. SMEs have no time to prepare descriptions of students’ learning or any documentation describing learning outcomes and competences. Their experience with Europass confirms this. The completion rates for Europass are very low as employers attribute little value to it. It can be hard for SMEs to stick to ECVET principles in reality. We should also notice the very low levels of involvement from companies in ECVET seminars, workshops and the forum - we should ask ourselves ‘Why do they not come?’ One answer was suggested: ‘We cannot expect small companies to be more involved, if we are not efficient.’

More direct involvement from companies in the process of validation and recognition could help.

In term of volume, the number of academics involved in VET mobility should be increased; it is very low compared to academic mobility in higher education or with work placement mobility in VET. In addition the number of mobile academics should be increased; mobility should not be seen as only geographical.

Finally, the risk of a ‘brain drain’ for small countries should not be underestimated and it should be considered as part of our thinking.

### **On what we need**

The four main needs according to a ranking exercise completed by the participants were:

- quality standards to describe learning outcomes;
- a marketing or advertising campaign to show good practice, to explain tools and templates, and to disseminate the outcomes from projects and experiments;
- greater transparency of qualifications which are based on learning outcomes. It would help if there was a mapping of VET systems to provide general knowledge on different systems and make comparisons possible [Mika Saarinen commented that Cedefop has developed some useful material about VET systems that might not be well enough known];
- a greater use of the EU/ECVET key words, particularly as part of the students’ experiences (This work could be done by National Agencies.)

Some other needs were mentioned in response to the barriers and weaknesses identified above: the involvement of Chambers of Commerce to reach small businesses, experts visiting schools and companies, face to face meetings, synergies between EU tools, greater involvement of the competent authorities and stakeholders, greater clarity about the assessment criteria and procedures, facilitating ECVET partnerships, and the need to create a community of practice.

## Workshop 2: ECVET as a multiplier for lifelong learning

Facilitators: Gabriela Ciobanu and Andre Huigens  
Introduction by Ralph Kristiansen from the PERMEVET project

*“ECVET is applicable for all learning outcomes which should in principle be achievable through a variety of education and learning paths at all levels of the EQF, and then be transferred and recognised .... It contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners. It particularly facilitates the development of flexible and individualised pathways and also the recognition of those learning outcomes which are acquired through non-formal and informal learning ”.*<sup>1</sup>



It will improve further the mobility and portability of qualifications at the national level and between various sectors in the economy and within the labour market.

Workshop 2 focused on the potential benefits of ECVET for lifelong learning. Participants were invited to consider the relationships between ECVET and validation of informal and non-formal learning as well as the value of ECVET within individual learning pathways. This could include horizontal (from one sector to another) mobility and vertical (same sector from one level to another) mobility. This workshop further aimed to identify key issues that could be resolved through an ECVET community of practice.

The workshop was introduced by Ralph Kristiansen from the PERMEVET project PERMEVET, organised by Oslo and Akershus University College, explored how the learning outcomes and the combination of the European tools (most specifically EQF, ECVET and validation) would support permeability between different qualification levels in four occupational areas (automotive, electronics, construction and floristry). The partnership consisted of 15 members from seven countries (AT, DE, DK, IS, IT, LT, NO).

The project coordinator, Mr. Kristiansen, introduced the main issues related to lifelong learning in terms of learning pathways, horizontal and vertical mobility, transfer, validation, learning out-

(1) Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18/6/2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for VET. Official journal of the European Union, C 155, 8.7.2009 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>)  
Kristiansen, R. A. (2011). PERMEVET: Permeability in post-secondary VET Pathways to professions? <http://www.hioa.no/index.php/content/download/11556/140201/file/2011-12-13%20RAK%20Presentation%20Permeability.pdf>

comes and the role of qualifications frameworks.

The project built upon previous ECVET related projects that support mobility and flexibility in Europe, especially the SME Master Plus project (AT, DE, FR, NO and SI), in which the idea of comparing and accrediting a master craftsman's certificate or qualification was explored. PERMEVET developed a holistic approach to learning outcomes without creating a divide in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

The first step for PERMEVET was to describe the competences in the sector specific qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes. The second step was to test the learning outcomes by preparing for a period of mobility. The descriptions of the learning outcomes were compared in terms of expectations between the partners and adjusted to facilitate future mobility and mutual recognition. The third step was to make comparisons in terms of EQF levels (mainly levels 4, 5 and 6) and types of training provision, such as VET institutions, universities and work based learning contexts.

### **The PERMEVET partnership has:**

- used common concepts, terminology and approaches based on learning outcomes to ensure compatibility between different systems and levels;
- tested a common approach to mobility, (taking account of the national legal barriers and constraints) in the automotive, construction, floristry and electronics sectors;

- developed and refined a collection of tools and methods to be used when exploring and developing compatible units or modules;
- established a platform to increase the attractiveness of VET. A reduction in the barriers between VET and higher education has helped to increase recruitment into more flexible training pathways;
- developed a common language based on learning outcomes organised in matrices which act as the “currency” that records individuals’ competence and qualification levels in small and medium sized enterprises.

### **During the workshop discussions, the debate focused on three key areas:**

- the key challenges and actions needed to develop ECVET for lifelong learning;
- how could ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning come together to support lifelong learning;
- the key challenges of developing a community of practice in relation to using ECVET to support lifelong learning.

### **The key challenges and actions needed to develop ECVET for lifelong learning**

The key finding from the workshop was that ECVET is a real tool for enhancing lifelong learning for citizens: learning outcomes and units connect ECVET to lifelong learning. ECVET allows different

learning pathways and flexibility in systems. It is not yet a reality in all European countries, but the process is on-going.

A common misunderstanding about lifelong learning is a perception that it is about school systems. In reality it is about labour markets, how the labour market works, how school and training systems respond to labour market needs and how the labour market can influence training. This perception might require a very important paradigm shift for an education system that is not unit-based. Sector representatives must be involved in lifelong learning and ECVET discussions in order to identify the needs of the labour market. One idea presented related to the development of a portfolio for the labour market (as long as there was no extra bureaucracy).

From the perspective of one of the ministry representatives there was not enough communication between competent bodies. National Agencies control what is happening in ECVET at a European level whereas the ministry deals with it at a national level. More obvious and frequent connections are needed between stakeholders.

Spreading basic information is not enough. Communication needs to focus on the added value of linking ECVET to lifelong learning. And more than communicating, the point is to create ownership and capacity building in order to really involve people in developing ECVET further. That communications challenge is also prevalent in the creation of a community of practice.

To act as a multiplier for lifelong learning, ECVET needs to be recognised by institutions involved in National Qualification Frameworks. ECVET's connection to the EQF must be seen as permanent.

### How could ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning come together to support lifelong learning

Validation processes for non-formal and informal learning are at different stages in European countries. In Sweden for example, the process is still on-going. In Finland, a system for validation of non-formal or informal learning is already in place and the connection with ECVET is planned as soon as ECVET is integrated into the legislation. France, with a validation system for prior learning appears "as a model of the ECVET spirit".

The unit and learning outcomes based approach of ECVET is relevant for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and for the creation of flexible lifelong learning pathways. For example, in Sweden the VET teacher certification system is being reformed as some teachers without an academic degree have been prevented from teaching. The learning outcomes based approach could support the validation of their prior learning. Sharing experiences of how ECVET and validation systems can collaborate could be fruitful.

We need concrete and common mechanisms for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The challenge is to make the lifelong learning system attractive, as an unattractive and outdated system has no chance of reaching its target. The motto could be "keep it smart and simple."

### The key challenges to developing a community of practice in relation to using ECVET to support lifelong learning

A community of practice is an important concept but it is not one that is easy to implement. There is a need to be clear about the social and learning practices that have to be developed. We need to clearly define the purposes of the community of practice from our own perspective as well as from the perspective of stakeholders and decision makers in order for them to understand what we are doing. Commitment and support by national authorities will be needed. National action and promotion will need to be undertaken. But before that, some questions must be answered, e.g.:

- how can practice be shared in an efficient way?
- who/which body will set the agenda?

The first task is to agree the purpose of a community of practice. This could be to:

- develop a common language, common tools, common methodology at European level;
- spread information about the correct way of writing learning outcomes;
- share tools, instruments and knowledge within the community of practice and with other communities of practice (e.g. the measurement, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning – including prior learning).



# Workshop 3: Sharing the added value of ECVET

Facilitators: Tormod Skjerve and Loukas Zahilas

Introduction by Jean-André Lasserre, AFT-IFTIM the leading French organisation providing VET in the field of transport, logistics and tourism



The ECVET recommendation identifies ECVET as the foundation for developing learning mobility and lifelong learning in VET; ECVET pilot projects and initiatives confirm this potential. It is also possible to consider ECVET from a more individual perspective:

*“The added value of ECVET is largely determined by national, sectorial, regional or local VET conditions and by VET reforms and changes already under way. It also depends on how ECVET can address specific shortcomings and difficulties facing VET systems.”* Identifying the added value of ECVET is the first of a list of 15 conditions for ECVET implementation<sup>1</sup> as agreed by the ECVET Users Group. It is pivotal at ECVET’s start and during its subsequent development.

This workshop focused on developing a shared understanding of the added value of ECVET. Participants were invited to reflect on how to best communicate ECVET’s added value and how to include this message when seeking to motivate and gain commitment in their national, sectorial, regional or local contexts. This workshop also aimed to identify key issues and formulate proposals which could be taken forward in the ECVET community of practice.

## Introduction from Jean-André Lasserre

On behalf of his organisation, AFT-IFTIM, Jean-André Lasserre has led different projects that relate to ECVET and European mobility. AFT-IFTIM is the leading French organisation providing VET in the field of transport, logistics and tourism in both a European and international context. AFT-IFTIM provided IVET and CVET to approximately 200,000 learners in 2010.

Mr. Lasserre offered his views on the added value of ECVET from a number of perspectives as AFT-IFTIM is a VET provider, and a professional association representing employers’ and employees’ organisations. Mr. Lasserre introduced the workshop by explaining one of his organisation’s projects.

## Eurotrans - an opportunity for a branch organisation to be involved in ECVET

The Eurotrans project considered how to develop a community of practice that could use ECVET to support training centres. The focus of the work was a Level 5 qualification for “dispatchers”.

(1) Cedefop (2012). Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012. [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4113\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4113_en.pdf)

### Main objectives of the project:

- to develop a new way to cooperate with the Ministry of Education and European Partners;
- to respond to the lack of attractiveness of employment in the sector through the development of a more open international environment.

The project succeeded because the branches/training centres were used to working with their partners at a European level.

Following the description of the project, participants were invited to identify some of the key words or phrases relating to the added value of ECVET. The following were suggested by the group:

- transparency;
- recognition;
- to work with different stakeholders;
- more fulfilling experiences for students;
- partnership;
- quality;
- harmonisation of practice;
- permeability;
- networks;
- competences in a national perspective.

It was reasonably easy for participants to describe the added value of ECVET in their own contexts e.g. ECVET provides a quality assurance measure for mobility, ECVET eventually facilitates employability and recruitment, ECVET creates permeability within the system at a national level. There was also added value in relation to validation and recognition. Not only did ECVET offer a recognised period of mobility but it also offered a recognised qualification that would be understood in other countries. This is an easy argument for the general public to understand. The learning outcome approach, as opposed to an input oriented approach, is definitely a convincing argument for the general public, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged in society. The opportunity to create a community of practice is, in itself, something that could add value.

To ensure it adds value, an ECVET community of practice should focus on employability, mobility, transparency of skills and qualifications, a common understanding of terminology, the benefits of using ECVET, creating tools for assessment and the quality control of validation. These topics should be developed using a 'bottom up' approach.

# Workshop 4: Moving to the effective implementation of ECVET

Morning facilitators: Rob Van Wezel and Pauline Van Den Bosch

Introduction by Christiane Eberhardt (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Germany)

Afternoon facilitators: Fiona Bibby and Thierry Lefeuvre

Introduction by Alain Bultot (Agency for Education Formation in Europe, Belgium)



own VET system. This workshop also aimed to produce a set of shared statements on what is functioning well and what obstacles still need to be overcome. The challenges and proposals for action will help to inform the development of the ECVET community of practice.

## Introductions

### The CREDCHEM project - Christiane Eberhardt

Christiane Eberhardt's introduction was based on her experience in the European CREDCHEM project and its further development. She also discussed the development of ECVET in the German VET context and commented that *"ECVET is not something which sells itself. ECVET-based mobility elements require general conditions to be in place which are aligned towards avoiding duplication of work and making existing ECVET approaches available for subsequent use by companies, schools or educational providers."*

The CREDCHEM network worked on the development and provision of units based on learning outcomes for the chemical sector.

Since the 2009 agreement on the ECVET Recommendation, there has been a unique opportunity for Member States and sectors to initiate and develop trials and test out ECVET implementation issues. More than 150 European projects have looked at ECVET in Europe.

The first wave of these experiments ended in December 2011 and these were included in the 2012 publication on implementation<sup>1</sup>. The experiences of those who ran projects shone a light on ECVET which has led to a greater understanding of its potential and obstacles to implementation. The ability to reflect on these experiences and continue to test out ideas is important to support elements of the work of the newly mandated ECVET national experts.

This workshop focused on the achievements and challenges to date. The discussion aimed to inform the further development of ECVET as a fully-functioning credit system for VET in Europe. Participants were invited to reflect on the characteristics of ECVET using their own experiences and knowledge of their

(1) GHK Consulting (2012). We have tried ECVET: Lessons from the first generation of ECVET pilot projects. Synthesis of results and project portraits. [http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/Seminars/ECVET\\_Brochure\\_singlepages\\_allthesame.pdf](http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/Seminars/ECVET_Brochure_singlepages_allthesame.pdf)

With a particular focus on units which support mobility, the project wanted learners to be able to achieve these learning outcomes in a wide range of contexts. The purpose of the network was to promote the integration of recognised periods of mobility into formal training programmes in the chemical sector. In order to foster integration and ensure the quality (it was hoped that CREDCHEM would be seen as a “quality label”), a set of tools and standards for mobility were developed.

Why was this project successful and why does it provide a good example to discuss during the workshop?

- CREDCHEM has set up a sustainable network with a Board comprised of relevant stakeholders, including social partners, in the chemical industry;



- the project uses the learning outcomes approach. Even when countries’ national systems were not ready, the partnership worked on independent units, based on learning outcomes, that could be linked and integrated into formal training pathways or which could be used as an “additional qualification”. Learning outcomes were defined on the basis of professional work tasks which are required by the labour market, no matter where the learners are trained. This ensured transparency and recognition in the labour market as well as in the education institutions of partner countries;
- units of learning outcomes are based on several EQF levels. This made them a better fit in formal training programmes and in different labour market situations. Each unit was accessible for learners at different levels.

### The OPIR project - Alain Bultot

The OPIR project (Outils Pratiques Inter-Régionaux) has been coordinated by the Ministry of Compulsory and Adult Education in the French Speaking Community of Belgium. Alain Bultot who managed the OPIR project presented the project objectives as:

- implementing ECVET in the hairdressing and auto mechanic sectors;
- developing social mobility;
- increasing the permeability between different French speaking Belgium VET sub - systems (there are three governments each with their own system);
- reducing drop-out rates and increasing the graduation rate.

This final objective was shared by all the stakeholders and explains why quick results were obtained. Taking stock of the experience of the project team, Alain Bultot emphasised the methods that had been used to develop learning outcomes, a Learning Agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding. From their experience, Alain Bultot concluded that ECVET technical specifications were not too difficult to implement. The main issues are the need to be clear about objectives, to involve stakeholders and to have a realistic implementation plan which takes account of the available funding and human resources. In relation to learning outcomes, Alain Bultot explained the need to ensure that the definition in the ECVET Recommendation is well understood. A first step was the production of a leaflet that could be adapted by all those who were involved in the pilot project.

ECVET can be adopted even when partners have different approaches or languages. To succeed it is important to develop networks of participants as well as a community of practice. OPIR found that it was more productive to develop “job profiles” as this offered opportunities to negotiate an area for learners’ mobility. This approach was found to be better than comparing qualifications in different countries.

In the French speaking Community of Belgium, ECVET points were an additional aspect of the project and they were used to express the relative weight of a unit in a qualification.

In the OPIR project, ECVET mobility was tested in five partnerships, each

with their own Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This was a practical and manageable arrangement. If the project had organised mobility between all the partners, 20 MoUs would have been needed. This would have required a much simpler model of a MoU or a sectorial network to make things work.

The project has been evaluated. This showed the importance of the involvement of the teaching teams who completed everything on a voluntary basis. Their role, despite an administrative burden which is far too heavy, is essential.

The project was based on teamwork as this is the best way of working to implement the ECVET tools. The team found that when the learning outcomes and the requirements for mobility were clear, the teachers were able to work together.

**Following the inputs from Christiane Eberhardt and Alain Bultot, participants discussed what strategies could be used at a national level to overcome resistance to implementing ECVET.**

For some, the real meaning of ECVET is not always considered. A well as having a clear purpose – it is about improving the quality and relevance of training periods abroad and developing greater permeability in national systems - ECVET has both a broad perspective and narrow technical aspect. Both of these matter.

The potential of ECVET depends on the national/regional VET system (e.g. see the CREDCHEM project), because this defines the framework in which ECVET

is implemented, e.g. implementation in a dual system will not be the same as in a modularised system which uses an accumulation process (this is often within a school based system). ECVET will not reach its full potential without mobility being fully integrated through the accumulation of learning outcomes; without greater transparency of learning outcomes or credit points; or without good documentation of learning outcomes achieved abroad which can be included in certification ( the final examination of the competent body).

The background paper for the forum stated that “it is clear that ECVET implementation requires a qualification system that is output oriented and divided in units”, but, this did not seem clear to all workshop participants. As Mika Saarinen (Centre for International Mobility in Finland) underlined in his synthesis of the workshops at the end of the forum, there are three approaches to using ECVET:

- without changing the existing qualification system (“We have a national qualification system, and now we are checking how ECVET can be used and applied to that”);
- as a catalyst to change the existing VET system;
- without changing major parts of the system (“ECVET is an opportunity, but we want to do it as long as it does not affect the whole system”).

According to Mika Saarinen, these approaches sometimes affect the discussions about the effective implementation of ECVET. Much of the discussion assumed that full implementation is per-

ceived as a challenge and that it might be easier to apply it gradually. This reflected Isabelle Le Mouillour’s analysis when she mentioned ‘wait and see’ countries.

As part of the workshop, participants identified a series of proposals for ECVET:

- ECVET should be part of a communication tool which is developed and directed towards users. It is not only a means of certification. We should more clearly identify how ECVET can be used in different contexts and target our communications to these contexts. We need a much more focused communication approach which responds to specific needs;
- our publicity should aim at disseminating the learning outcomes approach. This needs to motivate stakeholders and position ECVET as a domestic mobility tool as well as an international mobility tool. We should look at presenting all the EU education initiatives as one package which focuses on ECVET, EQF and EQAVET;
- we need practical tools which improve the daily use of ECVET. We also need a project management methodology in order to have a more professional approach;
- we need common language/terminology, common methodology and a European standard;
- considering the diversity of systems of apprenticeships, strong and comparable systems of quality control must be developed. This would require some system of enforcement.

## The workshop also identified the key challenges in developing a community of practice

- How to use ECVET for short periods of mobility (2-3 weeks)?

**Reflections:** there is a need to define specific learning outcomes that can be achieved in a short period, and convince companies of the added value of extended mobility periods;

- How to use the learning from everyone's experiences?

**Reflections:** we need time to exchange practice, develop practical guidance and a 'tool box' approach to support implementation;

- How to emphasise the importance of a learning outcomes approach in the recognition, assessment, description of qualifications, and in adapting qualification descriptors. How can we share our knowledge of the different approaches?

**Reflections:** learning outcomes should be defined in relation to tasks completed at work;

- How can we persuade all the stakeholders?

**Reflections:** we need to strengthen the quality assurance system and establish standards (similar to the

Bologna Process standards) which will motivate and involve the relevant stakeholders. We also need to exchange practices through peer learning activities;

- How can we deal with national regulations and legislations?

**Reflections:** there is a need for greater political will at the national level. Using ECVET (and the learning outcomes approach) can act as a catalyst for changing systems;

- How can we secure the financial resources for publicity and dissemination materials;

**Reflections:** there is a need for more visibility in education and finance ministries. We could create a hub at both the regional and sectorial levels to encourage involvement. We need to inspire more, possibly through telling stories of success. This could help to convince companies and accrediting bodies of the added value of ECVET.

## Participants also discussed what could be developed in a community of practice.

The following summarises the discussion. It includes, in a non-prioritised list, the ideas expressed:

- improving existing templates in order that stakeholders can move towards multilateral arrangements;
- guidance on principles which can underpin writing learning outcomes;
- information on developing an integrated approach to ECVET, EQAVET and EQF which can be used by all stakeholders;
- the contribution of ECVET to a European labour market;
- advice on how to capitalise on mobility projects;
- how to develop further social partners' European awareness;
- connections between ECVET and other initiatives from the lifelong learning agencies (e.g. e-twinning);
- a data bank on ECVET materials which includes tools, documentation and examples of good practice;
- materials and information which can be used to motivate stakeholders; opportunities and examples of how to work with accrediting bodies.

## Thematic session 2: Towards an ECVET community of practice

The second thematic session focused on defining an ECVET community of practice. It enabled participants to reflect on the roles and resources of the VET stakeholders and their own commitment and involvement in an ECVET community of practice.

An ECVET community of practice would represent a further step within the European ECVET initiative. The last few years have seen the emergence of ECVET, the development of activities and the involvement of a large number of organisations (including those from the public and private sector, education providers, ministries, sector organisations, trade unions, teachers and trainers etc.). Issues such as transfer of best practice, information on ECVET developments, expert discussions on specific aspects of ECVET are all happening in many different settings. The time has come to transform the current ECVET initiatives, projects and networking activities into a more reliable, resourceful and sustainable type of cooperation which prepares for 2014: this means letting the ECVET community of practice take shape.

This session began on the second day with two keynote speeches to set the scene and establish the basis for discussions in subsequent workshops.

### PRESENTATION

Soren Nielsen (formerly at the ETF in Turin)

## What is a community of practice?



The introduction to today's discussion has made me think about something completely different. Two years ago I read an interview in the Financial Times. The interviewee – an old distinguished judge – told a story of when he was young and he once met an attractive young woman who said to him: "come with me - let's go down to Soho and do something sordid". He did not dare to go with her because he thought she wanted him to eat from dirty plates. It is an example of how we sometimes have trouble understanding words.

But let's start with our topic. Yesterday, Antonio Silva Mendes said something very important. He said we needed to take responsibility. There is no time to waste in a context where many face extreme unemployment, e.g. young people in Spain and Greece. He said we had to concentrate our actions and to

provide young people with at least one extra competence. I just come back from Sardinia - I have just retired from the ETF - and there, in the middle of the mountains, I met young people involved in agro-tourism and speaking very good English. And when I asked where they had learnt this fluency, they said: "it is from an Erasmus stay in Europe." This was a very interesting experience, because it reminded me that we often forget the practical impact of what we are doing. The additional competence they acquired within Erasmus enabled them to start a business in the tourism sector.

Another issue underlined by Cedefop's Acting Director, Christian F. Lettmayr, is the need to be practical and provide people with material that is easy to use. He also said we live in a free world, and if citizens do not want to work with us, our action will be in vain. At this stage, the key words of Mr Rivière on the role of the social partners are crucial. Indeed, we need the cooperation of employers and trade unions and I regret that they are not well represented here.

I will look at the European Training Foundation's (ETF) experience of implementing communities of practice, in particular

the LEARN project (2007-2009)<sup>1</sup> and the Teacher Training project in Montenegro (2010-2011). These projects show how the idea of a community of practice has been tested. I will then present the possible barriers to implementing a community of practice and offer some thoughts about how the ECVET network can develop into a community of practice.

First of all, let me explain the context for these projects. Since 2001, the ETF has been working with a VET teacher network of Western Balkan countries – Albania and the six countries of the former Yugoslavia. Working with transition countries means facing language and cultural barriers. To better cope with these challenges, the ETF developed a policy learning approach, which differs from a policy transfer or a policy copying approach. Our approach aims to develop resourceful human beings rather than developing what is usually called “human resources”.

A community of practice is a new name for an old phenomenon. The concept was developed by Etienne Wenger<sup>2</sup> and is based on the idea of people helping each other. This is not a new idea, but the concept has contributed to our understanding of how organisations learn. It emphasised the need to be concerned about content rather than form and to create the right conditions for learning. A community of practice is action oriented, knowledge-based and uninhibited by organisational structures. For example, yesterday, even when there was some activity and discussion (thanks to the facilitators) we were in a situation where we were asked to

stop our discussions in order to go to the next stage. It is not the right way to work in the framework of a community of practice: we need time, we need more free space, and we need a more open context for learning. There is a difference between traditional working groups and a community of practice. Isabelle Le Mouillour will stress this later.

How did we implement the community of practice in the LEARN project in the Western Balkans? Our first phase was based on defining the community of practice in 2006 and 2007. We wanted to bring together groups of teachers, teacher educators and policy makers in order to integrate practice with policy. We needed a group with a common interest to work together in a new form, in a responsive and independent fashion, in order to promote learning, solve problems and develop new ideas. We wanted to create an area with much more space for free and unstructured learning as compared to the usual working groups.

### Why did we choose the communities of practice approach?

Because it recreates an old form of mutual learning based on working with peers – we call it horizontal learning. It is the exact opposite of what you are experiencing now. You are now suffering because somebody is telling you what to think. You are victim of the vertical learning approach – a top-down model. And I am sure that the only word you will remember from my presentation is ‘sordid.’

I don’t know how far the European Commission is willing to go in this direction – one that gives a much wider and freer space to participants – but I would strongly recommend it. In our ETF experience with communities of practice, we reduced the number of conferences and the traditional dissemination of knowledge. We noticed that this top-down, vertical type of learning did not work, or at least it was not enough. We therefore identified people who were dealing with the same issues and brought them together. Communities of practice can also be used in urgent situations. As an example, I will share with you the true story of my son. In 2004 he suffered a traffic accident and remained unconscious for eleven days with a serious brain trauma. I had the opportunity to observe the staff, and I noticed that they had a screen giving them updated news about this type of brain damage. They had access to relevant knowledge from all over the world at each stage of their work. They received just-in-time knowledge on exactly what to try. Since then, I have been convinced that being able to identify groups among you who have and are willing to share the specific knowledge you need is a potential for effective problem-solving among experts. It is much more efficient and much cheaper than traditional learning. I learnt this from my experience in the hospital ward.

### What is a community of practice?

According to Etienne Wenger<sup>2</sup>, it is a group sharing a specific practice, interested in learning from each other – and together, they have an ambition to share ideas, papers, models etc. – in a specific area.

(1) Learning from ‘learn’ horizontal learning in a Community of Practice in South East Europe, available from ETF [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

(2) Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation’ Lave, J and E. Wenger, 1991 New York: Cambridge University Press.

## What about you as the ECVET network? Are you a community of practice?

The three elements that constitute a community of practice are the 'domain' (the definition of the area of shared inquiry and of the key issues), the 'community' (the relationship between members and the sense of belonging) and the 'practice' (the body of knowledge, methods, stories, cases, tools, documents, etc.). These elements must be underpinned by support for the process, coaching, logistical assistance and an adequate ICT infrastructure without an unnecessary emphasis on fancy technology.

A community of practice also means encouraging people to be involved in the community by valuing their work and publicising their successes. I think the need to prepare the messages carefully is gravely underestimated. For example, two days ago I read an article in an Italian newspaper about the necessity to support periods of mobility abroad in the context of crisis and unemployment. And there was no mention of ECVET. Why? You offer a way to make these things happen. Maybe a community of practice could be the way to stimulate more targeted publicity and marketing efforts.

Supporting the community of practice means providing people with a room where they can put documents and share experience (it could be in Moodle, in-groups or Facebook). Good and valid experiences should be made available to all by putting it on the website. Authorities (DG-EAC, CEDEFOP, govern-

ments) should support the community of practice and frequently show their interest – they could also ask the community of practice to do something useful for them.

From my experience I can attest that a community of practice needs a domain that energises a core group. There must be an efficient coordinator, active involvement of experts, and you need to address the details of practice, ensure the right rhythm and offer a mix of activities and give opportunities for communication.

### Critical success factors

CoP	Organisation/nation
Domain that energises a core group	Strategic value and relevance of domain
Skillful coordinator with good reputation	Visible sponsorship, but without micro-management
Involvement of experts	Formal and informal structures
Address details of practice	Adequate resources
Right rhythm and mix of activities	Consistent attitude among actors
Communication opportunities	Transnational CoPs

With the LEARN project we had a well-established network culture before we built opportunities. We started the VET teacher network project in Sofia with a forming phase (2002). After a storming and norming phase (2003) we had the performing phase (2004-2009). During this last phase we had to admit that our conferences were having too low an impact on country policies. People were very active but this was not reflected in the national political level in their home countries. When talking with ministries in Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia I could see that our work had little visibility and nearly no impact.

We had to ensure that the results of our work were reflected at the political level. In 2007 we noticed another limitation - organising everything created an unhealthy dependency. We had a pool of experts from the UK, Denmark and Poland who were working very hard, but it was not really related to what participants were actually doing at home.

### The shift to a community of practice

From each of the eight countries (six ex-Yugoslavian countries, Albania and Turkey) we needed a policy maker from the ministry, a teacher educator from a university, a school leader and VET tea-

chers. We defined the domain (improvement of teaching and learning in VET) and the practice (annual conference, workshops, national projects, exchange of good practice, electronic platform and visits to one another). The big challenge is sharing knowledge: how can I use your knowledge to improve my practice? We realised that we had to start with action in order to share experience and knowledge and not the other way round. We found out that giving free space and responsibility to practitioners was effective. It is what I saw yesterday in the workshops, I saw the connections you can make through sharing your own experiences. This does not come from the experts. The LEARN project succeeded in creating a horizontal transnational learning platform in a regional context where top-down teaching is the dominant approach. The project forged links between VET experts from different levels in the system and from eight countries with troubled recent histories.

The problem we had is that the web-based platform was not used in the way as we had expected. The community of practice and the web-based learning networks need to be linked more closely.

In the national community of practice project in Montenegro (2010-2011)<sup>1</sup>, the biggest issue was to move to a bottom-up approach from a top-down one. Working in the field of teacher compe-

tence, a school-based model that focused on peer learning was organised as a community of practice. This worked surprisingly well for the local teacher trainers once the group had identified its real needs and experienced learning can take place by sharing knowledge among peers.

These experiences allowed me to identify some possible barriers for a community of practice:

- the balance between organisers (CEDEFOP, DG - EAC etc.) and participants (members of the ECVET network);
- getting the timing right when introducing new topics so they relate to the needs at a national level;
- the need for careful preparation and agreement on support and resources;
- the relationship between the internal networks and the external network.

#### HOW: Horizontal learning in CoP in Montenegro 2010-11

**Community:** A national project involving 20 teachers from 10 VET schools in Montenegro and the national VET Centre in a national CoP

**Domain:** New approach to school-based teacher competence development

**Activity:** Sharing experience from local pilot projects in own schools

- Learning from practice
- Learning from each other
- Learning from knowledge sharing
- Learning from experts/facilitators

(Manuscript for a 'HANDBOOK' is delivered to ETF)

#### Is the ECVET network as a community of practice?

The ECVET network is a group that shares a specific practice; it is a group that is interested in learning from each other – and together. It is a group with the ambition to share ideas, papers, models, etc. – in a specific area. Therefore ECVET is a good example of a community of practice; the unanswered question is in which areas. There must be more than one area/community of practice because you come from very different backgrounds.

If we focus on you as a community of practice, several questions follow: what would you call the domain? What practice do you have in common? What rules must be decided for the community to function well? What are the opportunities and which obstacles can be foreseen?

And finally, what are the issues and how shall we engage? And what can we do? I wish you success! I am sure you will be more responsive, more relevant and more visible in a community of practice.

(1) Manuscript for a 'HANDBOOK' is available from ETF

# What could be the ECVET community of practice?

A conversation between Didier Gélibert (ECVET team) and Isabelle Le Mouillour

Soren Nielsen has told us we are victims of vertical learning – a top-down approach. He told us about communities of practice and he gave a definition from Etienne Wenger: ‘communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’. In the ECVET context, the ‘group of people clearly designates all those involved or interested in ECVET. The group ‘shares a concern for the implementation of ECVET. What does ‘to do it better mean for us? It means ‘how to facilitate ECVET implementation’. Finally, the call to ‘interact regularly’ means a commitment to provide regular input as a member, not a one-sided commitment but a need to be interactive.

## But Isabelle, can you tell us why we should develop a community of practice?

### Communities of practice

Communities of practice are **groups of people** who **share a concern** or a passion for something they do and **learn how to do it better** as they **interact regularly**

Etienne Wenger

**Isabelle Le Mouillour:** We are at a turning point in the implementation of ECVET. Across Europe, countries are ready to make progress with ECVET, and a great deal of work has been done. It is now time to capitalise on this readiness and create a new form of cooperation. We have acquired a great deal of intelligence on ECVET, we have collected a lot of data, we have spent time reflecting on implementation, and we have developed templates and models. It is time to make the best use of all these resources. Over 200 people participated in the forum, and the ECVET network includes approximately 800 members. It is time to ensure better connections between the wide range of initiatives – building the interfaces between the neurones - and make use of the potential within the European ECVET network.

We have a political mandate that sets out the agenda for 2012 and 2014. This reminds us that it is time to go from the experimentation phase to a real implementation phase. We have spent time thinking about concepts, and we have learnt a lot from our experiences, now it is time to get going. A particular focus for the next phase of implementation is the impact of ECVET and credit systems on our VET systems. We should think about how we can make the best use of ECVET to improve our VET systems.

**The next main question, Didier, is what makes a community of practice the solution for the next stage of ECVET’s development?**

### Why an ECVET community of practice ?

- Willingness / readiness to progress with ECVET implementation
- Gained intelligence on ECVET
- Interfacing neurones
- From experimentation to gradual implementation
- Benefit from past experiences

**Didier Gélibert:** The first aim is to provide space - a framework - which connects those who are involved or interested in ECVET. Without this type of space, some people will not have the opportunity to be connected. The second aim is to find ways to share practice and some of the existing tools such as memoranda of understanding and learning agreements. A third aim is to learn together in order to create a common understanding – a community of practice can be the way to develop this common learning and understanding. We also need to find solutions together as we face the same obstacles to implementation – a community of practice

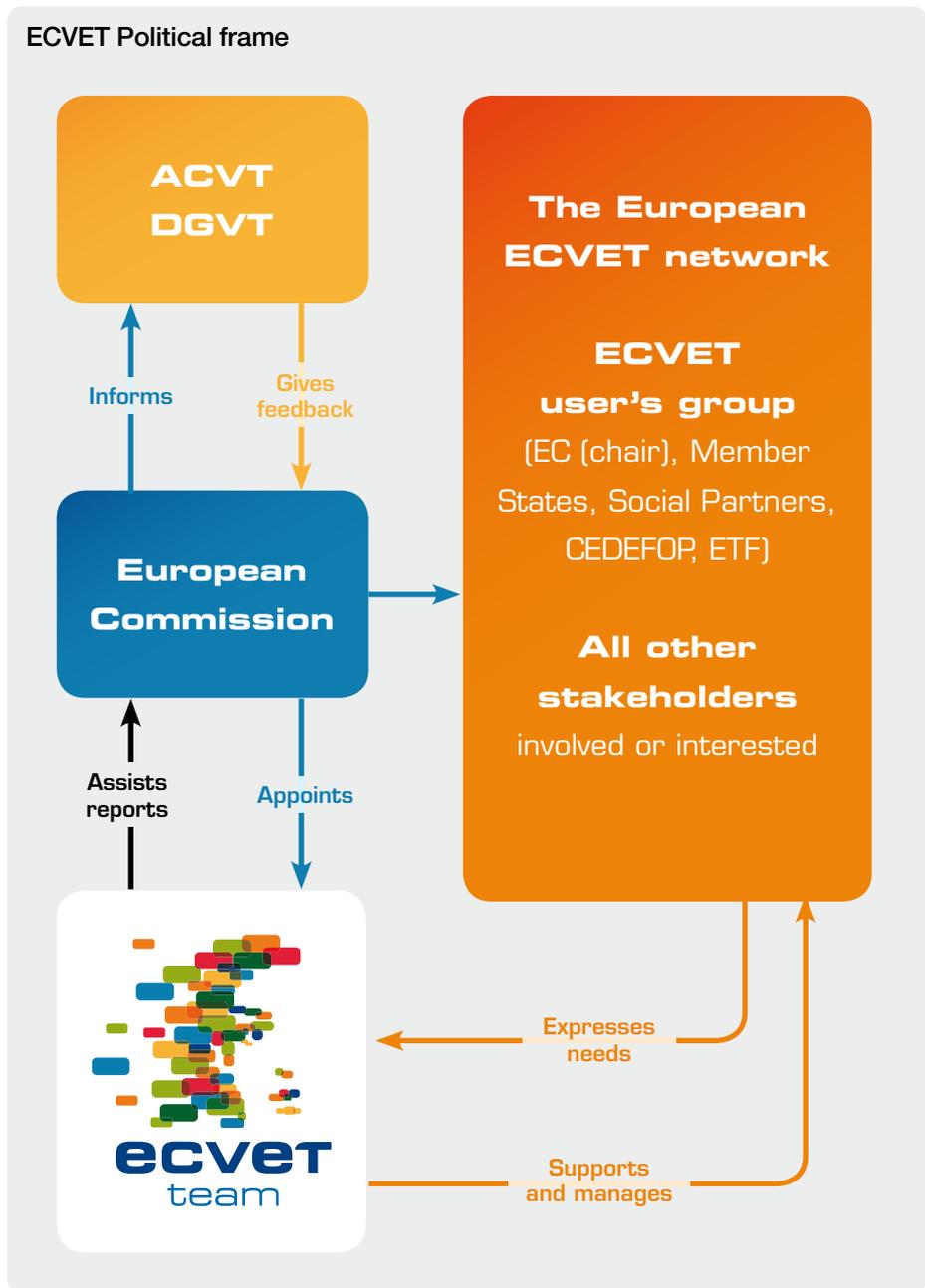
can help to stimulate our thinking so we can create new solutions. Our fourth objective for a community of practice is to avoid reinventing the wheel. We have many outcomes from our testing and experimenting - we need to connect people so they can use these results to implement ECVET. Finally we have to support and encourage cooperation between those who will share in this success.

**What for ?**

- Giving a framework to connect people involved or interested in ECVET
- Facilitating exchange between people on shared issues related to ECVET, including obstacles to overcome
- Promoting common learning
- Stimulating new solutions
- Avoid reinventing the wheel
- Supporting interaction and communication

**Isabelle Le Mouillour:** When you look at this from the outside, the governance of the European ECVET initiative looks complex. How will we organise ourselves in a community of practice? Could we build on our existing arrangements?

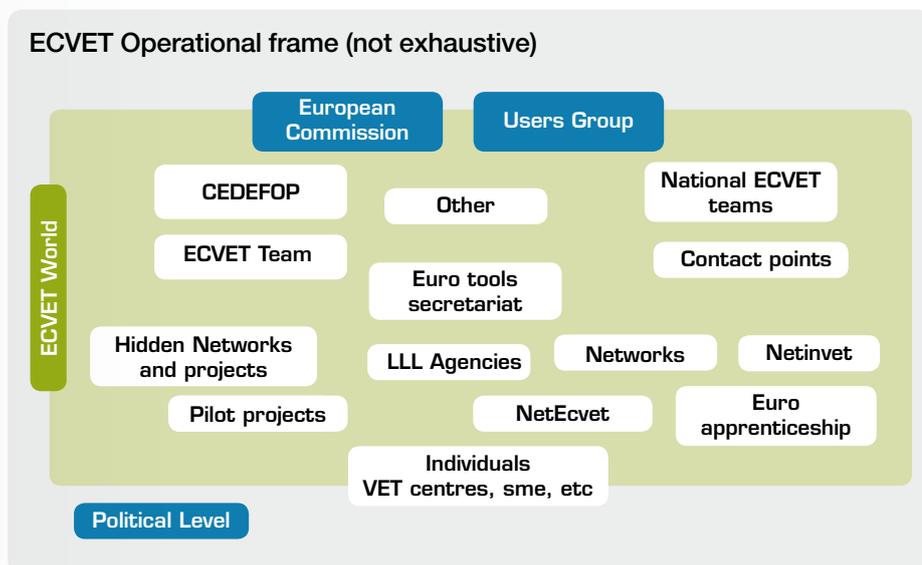
**Didier Gélibert:** There is a clear mandate for implementing ECVET. The ECVET team provides support to the European ECVET network which comprises the ECVET Users Group and stakeholders involved or interested in ECVET. But there may be another way of operating within a community of practice.



Alongside the political framework for ECVET, there are operational arrangements. These include the European Commission and the Users Group, as well as many networks (such as the secretariats for different European instruments, Cedefop, the National Lifelong Learning Agencies, the ECVET contact points, NetECVET and teams running

pilot projects). All these networks and teams need to be connected so they can work together. This will help them to cooperate, share practice, and find and exchange common solutions. And, as Mr Nielsen said 'create a learning space which provides more freedom than can be found in a series of working groups!'

## But what would this mean in practice?



**Isabelle Le Mouillour:** Let's illustrate this with an example: imagine a community of practice that connects organisations and individuals with an interest in learning outcomes, a memorandum of understanding, etc. You might have some other individuals or organisations who are interested in learning outcomes. One of the ideas behind com-

munities of practice – and Mr Nielsen spoke about communities of practice using the plural – is the opportunity to reorganise the 'ECVET world' with a stronger focus on the key issues and stakeholders' interests and concerns. When teachers and trainers want to know more about writing learning outcomes, their needs might be different

from those of a ministry representative. So should there be one or more communities of practice on learning outcomes?

We will need to develop an infrastructure and internet tools. However behind the complexity of the political and operational arrangements, we should remember that we are dealing with individuals who can be isolated and we need to find a way for them to work together. This would be our framework for cooperation. A major aspect of a community of practice is its ability to be self-organised, to involve different people who wish to work on an issue, and find solutions very quickly. In a community of practice one should be able to ask for specific information from a ministry representative or a VET teacher and find solutions from individuals and organisations within the community. The ECVET community of practice needs to be a sphere of resources and knowledge.



**Didier Gélibert:** I would like to summarise what could be the ECVET community of practice. The domain is ECVET implementation, the community means all those involved or interested in ECVET, the practices are all the methods, materials, guides, tools, experiments relating to ECVET as well as our shared concerns and questions.

Our goal for the community of practice comprises four main topics: sharing, solving, committing and making visible. What do these mean in our context?

- sharing means exchanging knowledge, learning, experience and tools;
- solving means stimulating the search for solutions to quickly overcome obstacles.

A community of practice can help in reaching a consensus which is sometimes difficult. It also means making connections between people and creating high quality partnerships;

- committing means that those in the community of practice are involved on an on-going basis and not only answering specific questions;
- making visible involves building on the common corporate identity that we have already created (ECVET logo). The ECVET community of practice needs to be accessible to all and provide an open window for anyone to see what we are doing. And finally, I agree with Mr Nielsen's recommendation that we need to set up events.

If we think about the resources, we should have the staff, the documentation, the results from ECVET experiments, and the financial and technical support. The question is how to get them into and use them within a community of practice.

### ECVET CoP: basics

<b>Domain</b>	ECVET implementation			
<b>Community</b>	All actors involved or interested in ECVET implementation			
<b>Practice</b>	All material, methods, tools, experimentations outcomes to put in common, initiatives			
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Sharing</b>	<b>Solving</b>	<b>Committing</b>	<b>Making Visible</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge</li> <li>• learning</li> <li>• outcomes</li> <li>• tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• obstacles and problems</li> <li>• reaching consensus</li> <li>• linkage</li> <li>• common development needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthen relationships between actors</li> <li>• regular interaction</li> <li>• interactive relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building a common identity</li> <li>• accessibility</li> <li>• setting up events</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	Staff, documentation, experimentation, financial, technical, support, etc			

# Feedback from the workshops

Mika Saarinen (Centre for International Mobility, Finland)

The workshops aimed at developing a common understanding of the ECVET community of practice and addressed four main issues: sharing (such as good practices), solving (e.g. common problems), committing (members should be active participants) and making visible (a community of practice should promote ECVET).

Participants reflected on how to use the ECVET community of practice to optimise and increase the efficiency of current arrangements for cooperation as well as to support their own ECVET activities. The discussions led to specific proposals for organising cooperation and ensuring lessons that have already been learnt could be transferred to other national, regional and local contexts.

## What could be the characteristics of the ECVET communities of practice?

The need for a real bottom-up approach was strongly emphasised. "Let the community of practice define itself." This would allow space for participants' real needs to enter the discussions. Ownership and capacity building emerged as important attributes in this process. A characteristic of the ECVET community of practice should be active participation: entering the community of practice means sharing, and using

what has already been produced, for example technical specifications and instruments.

A precondition for setting up a community of practice would be the need to define priorities for the target groups in order for them to find customised solutions.

Another important characteristic of a community of practice was the lack of permanency. It could help to solve issues and disappear once this has been done.

Finally, the communities of practice could be theme-based, with umbrella themes such as technical specifications, common instruments, ECVET expert teams, mobility, partnerships, assessment and recognition, promotion, ECVET in the workplace/training institutions and teachers etc.

## How could people and organisations get involved?

One of the workshops focused entirely on using the community of practice as a means to solve problems, create tools and share results. For example in the pilot projects, the idea would be to identify specific problems and solutions – it is sometimes difficult to identify the original problem when you review the outcomes of the projects. The idea would

Soren Nielsen offered some thoughts on the idea of a community of practice and two examples of how a community of practice had been implemented. Didier Gélbert and Isabelle Le Moullour provided some food for thought about an ECVET community of practice.

Finally Mika Saarinen (Centre for International Mobility, Finland) presented a summary of the outcomes from the workshops on sharing, solving and committing. This analysis was drawn from participants' discussions and their views on a future community of practice.

Facilitators: Rob Van Wezel, Tormod Skjerve, Pauline Van den Bosch, Segundo Gonzales, and Gabriela Ciobanu  
Supported by Alexandra Costa Artur, Isabelle Le Moullour, Hanna Autere, Didier Gélbert and Richard Maniak

be to generalise the solutions – as it can also be difficult to apply specific results to a new context.

A database of solutions was suggested which could include a bank of learning outcomes, specific examples of practice as well as a data base for sharing contacts and searching for potential ECVET partners. It was also important to consider participants' information requirements, their need for advice on mobility and quality assurance.

The workshop participants also discussed how to promote a community of practice. Possible solutions included practical tools (e.g. newsletters, articles, telephone contacts, letters, e-platforms, social media, social networks, on-line

communities etc.), information on the web-pages of ECVET national experts and the ECVET teams, peer-learning, face to face meetings, joint projects, conferences, seminars and other events. The need to establish a balance between the virtual nature of a community of practice with face to face events was strongly underlined.

And finally there was a question of how to match participants according to a community of practice theme and according to their level of knowledge.

### **How will members interact, communicate and collaborate?**

Potential members of a community of practice can come from many backgrounds: education/training providers, national or regional authorities, national ECVET experts, sectorial bodies, social partners and possibly students. We should expect the community to be very diverse in terms of knowledge and experience. If the community was open to everyone, there would be no criteria for selecting members and no testimonials would be required from potential new members. The workshop participants considered some of the basic rules that would be needed. These included: "Everybody is equal - everybody can learn from each other!" For example a ministry representative in a community of practice would not be a ministry representative but a member of the community. Many ideas to facilitate interaction, communication and collaboration between members were suggested. These included an easy to access web tool, the use of on-line communities, meetings and seminars,

peer-learning and also possible regional groups, sub-thematic groups and self-evaluation.

Participants also thought a glossary of terms would help to overcome the need for a common language.

### **How could the ECVET community of practice be managed?**

Participants had more questions than answers on this issue. As these questions on how best to manage a community of practice came from a large number of participants, they need to be resolved.

#### **Questions:**

- Both from a problem-based and need-based approach, participants wondered how many different communities of practice could they have;
- What could be the maximum size of the membership of a community of practice? This was related to questions about possible sub-groups (linguistic, thematic, geographical and sectorial sub-groups etc.);
- Should the management be centralised or de-centralised? At a European level, it is quite clear that a group like the ECVET team would be involved in the communities of practice with direction from the Commission and the ECVET Users Group. One group suggested that Cedefop and the ECVET team provide an interface between the different communities of practice. But to what extent and how? What could be the role of national expert teams and the Coordination Points? These questions arose in all the workshops;

- Do we need a steering group, a leadership team, a Board? One group prepared ideas for a possible eight-member Board elected on a rolling basis from eight countries. Membership could be individual or corporate and funded by the EU. Regional and national groups would ensure contact is maintained with individuals. However although this seemed contrary to the philosophy of a community of practice, a minimum of structure was needed. This issue must be solved before we can move ahead. Another suggestion was to establish a moderator, or a rotating moderator, in order to provide impetus rather than a formal structure;

- Finance was also raised. This is an issue as resources are limited and additional funds must be raised. The ideas of sponsorship, financial incentive, private-public partnerships were all discussed.

How best to organise the production of documents and report on activity across all communities of practice was also raised.

#### **Some quotes from the workshops.**

- *"There is the idea of an ideal model for applying ECVET out there, but also lesser approaches seem to produce similar results. Not everybody perhaps needs to implement all the elements for ECVET to be a success?"*
- *"More focus on making national qualification systems more flexible and also building mutual trust in these systems might get us further than creating complex common approaches."*
- *"Is ECVET really a tool in itself? Perhaps it is more of a process. This realisation clarified things for me."*



## Conclusion

João Delgado, Head of unit – DG EAC – vocational training; Leonardo Da Vinci, European Commission



Dear friends and colleagues

It is certainly not much of a pleasure to conclude such an interesting event by reminding us that Europe still faces a profound crisis with a difficult economic outlook. But crises are also tremendous opportunities for change.

Specifically our young people suffer from a high rate of unemployment. At the same time, employers complain that new entrants lack the most needed skills and many job holders are required to update their skills. In tools or processes like ECVET we should never forget the big picture and the purpose. Since our international competitiveness depends mainly on the skills of workers we need to build a smart skills strategy.

Apparently, our VET systems do not properly meet the labour market needs. We need more highly qualified people, and we must achieve lower levels of school dropouts.

Antonio Silva Mendes highlighted that in a global economy, employers also expect employees to understand technical documentation in a foreign language, to work with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds and to communicate efficiently with international customers. As you are aware, these challenges can be described as learning goals to gain within sectorial and geographical mobility. ECVET has a key role to play in this regard since it aims to facilitate the transfer and recognition of acquired skills and competences.

The testing of ECVET has been impressive so far and Member States and social partners are strongly committed to implementing the tool. Following Antonio Silva Mendes' request yesterday, all the key players are now called to take the exercise further by:

- Members States ensuring that the institutional and political conditions support ECVET implementation;
- the European Commission boosting this work and developing further supportive instruments like templates and tools;
- stakeholders using the project results with a view to mainstreaming them.

At the end of the day, we have to reach out to the people on the ground, explain the added value of ECVET, and make them exploit the existing toolbox. All of you have an important role to play. You are empowered to implement ECVET. But this freedom also gives you a responsibility.

A year ago, at the annual Forum in Madrid, we invited you to start converting the project work and networks into a long-lasting community of practice. This is the reason why we all – European Commission, the ECVET team and Cedefop – used this annual forum as a platform to jointly reflect on how we can succeed in this regard. As you have just heard - it is all about sharing and solving:

- sharing the existing instruments, methodologies and project outcomes with a view to extending ECVET partnerships between competent institutions;

- solving the problem of recognising what has been learnt so that the individual can build on these credits while progressing to further levels of learning.

It is our expectation that an ECVET community of practice will provide better support for sustainable mobility partnerships. This is in line with our political goal to make learning abroad a natural part of a VET scheme.

I should also mention that the future joint programme for education, training and youth “Erasmus for All” will offer considerable funding for mobility actions and sector skills alliances which aim to have a lasting impact on VET practices. And ECVET will also be supported and become a main tool in future mobility actions.

Due to your lively and valuable discussions during this year's forum I am optimistic that we will make much progress before we meet again at next year's forum. So, I would like to thank:

- the ECVET team, CEDEFOP and my colleagues from the European Commission who have efficiently organised the forum;
- all the speakers and facilitators;
- you for actively contributing to the debate;
- the interpreters who have to use our “Euro speak”;
- and specifically the Master of Ceremonies, Fiona Bibby.

**I would like to wish you a safe trip home.**







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